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## **Burning Issues: Reactions to the Highland press during the 1885 election campaign**

The *Scottish Highlander* newspaper from 16 October 1885, in its district news, includes the following report from Glenelg:

Mrs Macpherson, the Skye poetess, having arrived here some weeks ago in the yacht 'Carlotta' [...] on her departure last Friday night by the 'Claymore' she was accompanied to the quay by almost every man in the place, to whom she sang and recited with untiring effort, during the time she awaited the arrival of the steamer, her most appropriate pieces for the occasion, to the great appreciation and amusement of the crowd. At her request, copies of the *Scotsman*, *Courier* and *Northern Chronicle* were committed to the flames of a large fire lighted for the purpose, the ashes being afterwards carefully gathered and buried on the beach below high-water mark; the Poetess herself supplying the refreshments for the 'funeral'. This was done to show the hate and contempt in which these organs of their oppressors are held by the people.<sup>1</sup>

This 'protest' burning of newspapers in the Highlands in the later part of 1885 was not in fact an isolated incident, although this seems to have been the first time this happened, or at least is recorded as having happened. The incitement by Màiri Mhòr to burn those newspapers perceived by the crofters as their enemies, could be written off as a grand gesture in keeping with the larger-than-life character of the poetess of the Highland Land movement (particularly where the *Inverness Courier* was concerned). To do so, however, would be to overlook the central role which newspapers played in the Highland Land Agitation, no matter where their political loyalties lay, and the strength of feeling which they awoke among Highlanders. Màiri Mhòr's suggestion of burning copies of the *Scotsman*, the *Inverness Courier* and the *Northern Chronicle* says much about the role of newspapers and was to be followed, in the months preceding the General Election of November-December 1885 by numerous instances of newspaper burning across the Highlands. Not only does this underline the central role which the Highland press played in electioneering as it catered for an expanding and increasingly politicised readership, but it points to the dualities of the newspapers; both as purveyors of news, but also featuring in the news itself. The burning of newspapers was not, of course, unique to the Highland context and instances can be found of this taking place throughout the world up to the present day. What such incidents demonstrate is the extent to which newspapers are perceived as an important medium for the dissemination of information and the influencing of opinion.

The 1885 election campaign had effectively begun in June of that year when William Gladstone's Liberal Government, which had been in power since 1880, was defeated on a budget amendment by the combined vote of the Conservative and Irish nationalist MPs. Irish Home Rule was to feature prominently on the national political agenda in the run-up to the election, with both Liberals and Conservatives aware of the importance of winning the support of the Irish MPs (Hoppen 1998: 675–80). In the Highlands, land reform and church disestablishment – which was also an issue on the national political agenda – were to overshadow all other issues in what was to be the most keenly fought election which the Highlands had witnessed. The election took place in the

wake of agitation in Skye and Lewis which resulted in police and soldiers being sent to restore order, events which placed the crofters' campaign on the national political stage. The Sutherland Association had been formed in 1882, the Highland Land Law Reform Association (HLLRA) in London in 1883 and a similar association in Edinburgh in the same year, bringing cohesion and strength to the crofters' campaign. In 1883 the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Condition of Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands (the Napier Commission) had toured the Highlands, listening to the evidence of crofters and subsequently publishing its report in 1884. Most significant of all was the fact that this was the first election to take place after the Third Reform Act of 1884 which extended the franchise to a new section of the population. After the Second Reform Act of 1868 the Highland electorate stood at 9,943 voters, or 2.6% of the Highland population (Dyer 1996a: 19). As a result of the Third Reform Act there were some 50,644 enfranchised Highlanders in 1885, equivalent to 13.7% of the area's population, although less than the Scottish average of 15.4% (Dyer 1996b: 30).<sup>2</sup> The result of the election was the return of the Liberal Government, albeit one dependent on the support of the Irish nationalist MPs. For the Highlands it was to be a historic election with four crofting candidates returned as Members of Parliament: G. B. Clark (Caithness), Dr Roderick MacDonald (Ross and Cromarty), Donald Horne MacFarlane (Argyll) and Charles Fraser Mackintosh (Inverness-shire).

Newspapers have come to play an increasingly important part in the historiography of the Highlands in the later decades of the nineteenth century in recent years. While the press in the middle decades of the century provide the focus for Kristina Fenyö's *Contempt, sympathy and romance: Lowlands perceptions of the Highlands and the clearances during the famine years, 1845–1855* James Hunter, in his seminal *The Making of the Crofting Community*, acknowledges the role of newspaper reading in increasing the political consciousness of Highland crofters in later decades. (Hunter 1976: 129). I. M. M. MacPhail's *The Crofters' War* (1989) places considerable emphasis on the role of the Highland press, demonstrating that newspapers were at the forefront of the battle for the votes of the Highland crofters during the political campaigns of the 1880s. He comments that 'the people of Inverness, to judge from the number of newspapers, all politically aligned, must have been one of the most politically-conscious communities in the country (MacPhail 1989: 101). Newspapers have also proved to be an extremely valuable source for Gaelic poetry and song, as Donald Meek's *Tuath is Tighearna* demonstrates. He refers to the patronage which poets were to enjoy from newspaper editors who gave space to poetry and song – both political and non-political – in their pages (Meek 1995: 11–12). More recently Ewen A. Cameron (1996: 14), in his study of the government and the Highlands, and Allan MacColl (2006: 15–16), in his examination of the role of the Highland clergy in the land debate, have underlined the importance of contemporary Highland newspapers as an historical source (Cameron 1996: 14; MacColl 2006: 15–16). Similarly, Andrew G. Newby in *Ireland, Radicalism and the Scottish Highlands, c. 1870–1912* has made extensive use of the Highland press as has William Donaldson (2000), primarily the *Oban Times*, in his study of the Highland pipe. As far as attention to the press itself is concerned, James Hunter's biography of John Murdoch, *For the People's Cause* (1986) provides valuable insights into the challenges which newspaper editors and their publications faced and the role which they played in the increasingly politicised Highlands. Newby (2002) has concentrated on the transformation

of the *Oban Times* from a Whig to a more radical publication while Cameron (2007) focuses on John Murdoch and Duncan Campbell, editors of the *Highlander* and *Northern Chronicle* respectively, and the politics of newspaper publishing in Inverness in the later decades of the nineteenth century.

#### THE NEWSPAPERS AND THEIR READERS

The Highland newspapers covered the election campaign in depth, reporting the meetings, sometimes apparently verbatim, held by individual candidates and their supporters. Among the most prominent Highland newspapers of the Land Agitation years were: the *Crofter*, *Highland News*, *Invergordon Times*, *Inverness Advertiser*, *Inverness Courier*, *Northern Chronicle*, *Northern Ensign*, *Oban Times*, *Ross-shire Journal*, *Scottish Highlander*, incorporating the full gamut of political views from Conservative to Liberal and to more radical, pro-crofter publications.<sup>3</sup> Some of these, such as the *Inverness Courier*, the *Northern Ensign* and the *Oban Times* were well-established publications while others, notably the *Northern Chronicle*, the *Highland News*, *Scottish Highlander* and the *Crofter* were relative newcomers. The *Scottish Highlander*, financed by Charles Fraser Mackintosh, with Alexander MacKenzie as its editor, had only been set up in July 1885, less than six months ahead of the election with its main object declared as being ‘in a temperate but bold and independent spirit, to advocate the rights and promote the interests of the Highland people’ (*SH*, 17/7/1885). Accurate circulation figures for newspapers in this period are not readily available and we are dependent on the figures which the papers themselves supply. The *Scottish Highlander*’s circulation of, on average, over 4,000 copies per week by the end of 1885 was comparable with figures for the *Inverness Advertiser* at the same time, but was significantly less than those of the *Northern Chronicle* which sold an average of 6,500 copies per week in 1885, rising to 8,600 as the election campaign drew to a close (MacPhail 1989: 102; *IA*, 27/1/1885; Cameron 2007: 291). The interest in the forthcoming election clearly fuelled demand for newspapers. The editor of the weekly *Invergordon Times* reported in October 1885:

The circulation of this paper has gone up by leaps and bounds during the last year. This shows that the cause we are advocating is the People’s cause. Our impression last week was upwards of 6000 copies. This did not supply the demand, as the day after publication orders came in from all quarters for supplies which we regret much we were unable to execute, as we had the type taken down (*IT*, 7/10/1885).

Antagonism between the newspapers of differing political factions was ill-concealed. The *Scottish Highlander*’s editorial reference to the *Northern Chronicle* as ‘the political kept mistress of the Tory landlords’ and as ‘the poor hawering, raving *Chronicle*’ gives a flavour of the tensions, particularly between Alexander Mackenzie’s *Scottish Highlander* and other publications (*SH*, 21/1/1888).

As William Donaldson has discussed in his study of nineteenth-century popular literature, the Scottish press underwent a massive transformation in scale, both in terms of the number and frequency of publications and in circulation, in the course of the century as the restrictions placed upon newspapers by the government in the form of taxes were removed, thus making newspapers more affordable. As a result of the abolition of the advertisement tax (1853), Stamp Duty (1855) and the repeal of the duty

on paper (1861), alongside technical developments in the printing process and more effective distribution networks as transport links improved, an extensive network of cheap local papers was to emerge in Scotland (Donaldson 1986: 1–34). The Highlands benefited as much from this as any area with an unprecedented demand for newspapers by the 1880s, most of them selling for 1 penny. The increase in demand for papers was also fuelled to some extent by rising levels of literacy in the region thanks in large part, in the nineteenth century to the efforts of the Gaelic Schools Societies and the concomitant rise in demand for English teaching. The Education Act of 1872, in its formalisation of education, albeit an English-medium one, further extended literacy, although one should be wary of overstating levels of literacy. The result of the 1885 election for Ross and Cromarty records that of the 7995 constituents who voted (out of a possible 9988), some 1908 declared to the polling officers that they were unable to read, a large proportion of these being in Lewis (*NC*, 9/12/1885). Of course non-literacy should not be equated with an inability to access newspapers since for many in the nineteenth-century Highlands, the newspaper would have been a communal experience. As Donald Meek has pointed out, the reading of local newspapers became a feature of the cèilidh-house (Meek 2007: 169). Iain Mac’Illeathain recounts just such an event in mid nineteenth-century Tiree (*MT*, 29/11/1897):

[bha] an tigh cho làn ’s a chumadh e o oisean gu oisean le daoine sean ’us òg, a thàinig a dh’eisdeachd ri Iain Dubh a’ leughadh a’ phaipeir-naigheachd, oir cha robh paipearan-naigheachd cho lionmhor aig an am ud anns a’ Ghaidhealtachd ’s a tha iad an diugh, agus cha robh ach fìor fhear ainneamh aig an robh an sgoil Bheurla a b’ urrainn na paipearan a leughadh [...] Thòisich fear-an-taighe agus leugh e ’mach as a’ phaipear sgialachd a’ chogaidh o thoiseach gu deireadh, agus chluinneadh tu an drasd’ ’us a-rithist, ’n uair a bhris na Ruisianaich a stigh air camp nam Breatannach, ’s a bha iad a’ sgapadh ’s a’ marbhadh air gach taobh, ‘Och och! Mo chreach! Mo thruaighe’.

Sharing of newspapers within the community was also clearly envisaged when money was gifted to the people of Sconser by John Galloway Weir in 1885 for the express purpose of supplying the community with newspapers.<sup>4</sup> The *Oban Times* reports that a meeting agreed upon purchasing:

*Oban Times, Glasgow Mail, Scottish Highlander, Democrat, Invergordon Times, Crofter, Inverness Advertiser, Echo, Aberdeen Free Press*, and what will your vendors think, the *Northern Chronicle*. Yes, the *Courier*, for the double reason that it keeps the landlords blindfolded, whereby we can steal a march on them, so we wish to encourage it, and that its servile trumpety serves as an irritant to goad us on to battle and victory ...’ (*OT*, 21/11/1885).

The growing popularity of newspapers in the second half of the century is confirmed on a number of occasions by those giving evidence to the Napier Commission in 1883. The Rev. Donald Mackinnon, minister of the Skye parish of Strath agreed with Sheriff Nicolson that newspapers were read much more by the people than they had been thirty years previously and commented that, where previously there were four newspapers

delivered to the parish, there were now some twenty (*Nap. C. I:* 254). The Rev. John Macrae, minister of North Uist confirmed that the same held true for his parish, although affordability was clearly an issue for some with John McDonald, Gramisdale, commenting that no one in his township could meet the expense of a newspaper (*Nap. C. I:* 816; *Nap. C. I:* 784).

It was clearly with some anticipation that the arrival of newspapers was awaited, particularly in more remote areas. A letter from a Stornoway reader of the *Northern Chronicle* during the 1885 election campaign, complains indignantly of policemen who:

block the way and obstruct the entrance to a newsagent's shop in their anxiety to obtain papers before the general public. The steamer Lochiel arrives here generally about 11p.m., and our obliging newsagent is always ready to sell his papers at that unearthly hour and a large number of the inhabitants take advantage of his thoughtfulness to get their papers. It is on occasions of that description that the police are often seen pushing and elbowing their way among respectable people to their intense annoyance (*NC*, 21/10/1885).

Newspapers were an important source of information about events elsewhere in the Highlands. Màiri Mhòr indicates this in 'Gaisgich Loch Carann', composed when the Strome Ferry crofters, who had been imprisoned for their stand against the unloading of fishing boats on the Sabbath in 1883, returned home, 'Leugh sinn le aoibhneas 's aiteas, / Sibhs' a dhol dhachaigh gun bheud,' the reference here presumably being to this being reported and read in the press. In 'Ibhri agus na Croitearan', the poet, using the name 'Eisdealach', has used the *Oban Times* as a source of information about Sheriff Ivory's military expedition to Skye in 1886:

Bha naidheachd bhrònach an *Tìm an Obain*

A rinn mo leònach, 's gu mòr a ghluais mi,

Mo cho-luchd dùthcha bhith am prìosan dùinte,

'S an cuid ga spùinneadh le ùghdarras uachdaran (Meek 1995: 170–71).

Questions asked by members of the Napier Commission in 1883 indicate that the Commissioners were very aware of the Highland press and its ability to influence the minds of those giving evidence as, on a number of occasions, witnesses were asked if they had read about the Commission's meetings in the press. Often the evidence given to the Commission was reproduced in newspaper columns. When asked, John Robertson, a Portree merchant confirmed that he had been reading the newspapers and the reports of statements made by crofters in the places visited by the Commission (*Nap. C. I:* 546). Alexander Ross of Scourie was asked when he had first heard that delegates were to be chosen to give evidence before the commissioners he replied that '...when the commissioners were at the Lews I saw it in the papers' (*Nap. C. II:* 1689). The Rev. Angus MacIver, Miavaig Lewis confirmed that he too had been using newspapers to follow the evidence heard by the Commission (*Nap. C. II:* 913). The availability of evidence in the press allowed delegates to prepare for the Commissioners' visit to their own district as is apparent in the evidence of the Rev. Donald Dingwall, Free Church, Poolewe when he was questioned about how he had advised his parishioners as to the

points on which they were likely to be examined: 'I took my cue from the newspapers with regard to that; from the manner in which the delegates were examined in other districts' (*Nap. C. III*: 1883).

The Commission provided landlords and their spokesmen with an opportunity to expose what they saw as the seditious role of some sections of the press. The Rev. Donald Mackinnon of Strath, when asked which newspapers his parishioners read, is more cautious in his criticism than some, refusing to name any newspapers, but suggesting that (*Nap. C. I*: 254):

the sort of newspapers many of them prefer reading are not the newspapers that are calculated to lead them right, and give them wise counsel; and I am afraid a good many of the newspapers they read are calculated to make a breach between them and their best friends [...] I think if the *Scotsman* were a little more read, it might teach more rational views.

Donald Macdonald, whose designation as 'Farmer, Tormore' belies the fact that he had been factor for the Glendale estate during the unrest there in 1882, placed the blame for the Land Agitation firmly at the door of the, by then failed, *Highlander* newspaper which he saw as the main instigator of 'this unfortunate rebellion', as he put it, and he went on to criticise Alexander MacKenzie, editor of the *Scottish Highlander* (*Nap. C. I*: 595).

#### Gaelic AND THE PRESS

The new role which the Highland press was carving out for itself during the 1870s and 1880s had not passed its Gaelic-speaking audience by, with poets including the newspapers in their view of events. This was not in itself new as poets had welcomed the first Gaelic periodicals, earlier in the nineteenth century with eulogies as in 'Fàilte an Teachdair' *Ghae'laich* by 'Fior Ghael' (*TG* 6 1829: 133–35) and 'Fàilt' an *Teachdaire Ghaelaich*, by 'Seana Ghael' (*TG* 11 1830: 193–9), celebrating the publication of Norman MacLeod's *An Teachdaire Gae'lach* (1829–31). The first of these eulogies underlines the communal nature of the printed word (135):

Gun teagamh mar shealladh 's ro mhaiseach do'n t-sùil e,  
Mo chròilein m'an chagailt 'nuair thachaireas cruinn iad,  
Ag éisdeachd le aire, 's le barrachd de chùram,  
Gach sgeul, agus eachdruidh tha thu 'g aiseag d'ar n-ionnsuidh.

Similarly, Iain MacIlleathain (Bàrd Thighearna Cholla), by this time resident in Nova Scotia, composed 'Òran don *Chuirtear*' in praise of Norman MacLeod's second journal *Cuirtear nan Gleann* (1840–43), demonstrating the potential which such publications held for bringing together disparate Gaelic communities (Meek 2003: 202–204). By the 1880s poets were alert – and therefore no doubt so too were their audiences – to the potential of newspapers for advancing their cause beyond the bounds of the Highlands. The Glasgow-based poet, Dòmhnall MacFhionghain, in 'Òran mu Chor nan Croitearan', speaks of 'S gach pàipear san dùthaich toirt cunntais san àm / Mu chor ar luchd-dùthcha an dùthaich nam beann' (Meek 1995: 130–31). The same consciousness of publicising

the Highlanders' cause through the newspapers is evident in, 'Oran nan Saighdearan' by Tìree poet, Cailean MacDhòmhnaill who says:

Tha meas ac' air na pàipearan  
Air Ghalldachd 's anns gach àit',  
'S gur lìonmhor ceàrn san dèanar luaidh  
An cruas sa bheil sinn 'n sàs (Meek 1995: 155–56).

The importance of the press, and not solely the Highland press, in the later decades of the nineteenth century is underlined by the way in which newspapers were incorporated into the poetic rhetoric of the Land Agitation years, particularly in *brosnachadh* and *moladh*, (as defined by Meek 1995: 28–29). Examples which address the papers directly and which serve the dual function of eulogy and incitement include 'Duanag do 'n *Ard-Albannach*' (*H*, 31/1/1874), 'Buaidh leis an *Ard-Albannach*', (*H*, 30/5/1874) and 'Deoch Shlaint an *Ard-Albannaich*' by Seumas MacCoinnich, (*H*, 9/1/1875). The pro-crofting papers are symbols of confidence as when Màiri Mhòr, in 'Fios gu Clach Ard Uige' says of the *Highlander* (Meek 1998: 168):

Tha 'n *t-Ard-Albannach* le cùram  
Daonnan duineil air ar cùlaibh  
Seinn a-rithist dhuinn na trùmpaid,  
Chum ar dlùthachadh ri chèile.

and similarly in 'Oran an Diùc Chataich' she eulogises *An Gàidheal* for its cultural contribution: 'S o tha 'n *Gàidheal* a' cur nar cuimhne / Eachdraidhean is rainn na Fèinne / 'S a' Ghàidhlig a' togail a cinn, / Am measg nan rìghrean 's luchd na Beurla' (Meek 1998: 91). Iain MacIlleathain (Bàrd Bhaile Mhàrtainn) in 'Teachdairean na Bànrighinn' (Meek 1995: 127) expresses his hope for a positive outcome from the Napier Commission's enquiries which will benefit both the crofters and the newspaper which had supported them:

Nuair bheir iad suas an teachdaireachd,  
Bidh luchd an fhearainn dìte,  
'S thig meas air *Tìm an Obain*  
Anns gach baile mòr san rìoghachd.

The *Oban Times* is represented in Biblical terms as the bearer of good news and hope in MacIlleathain's song 'Do Dhòmhnall MacPhàrlain', which celebrates Donald Horne MacFarlane's victory in Argyll in the 1885 election (Meek 1995: 144):

Thigeadh *Tìm an Obain* sàbhailt'  
Mar chalaman Nòah don àiric,  
Le fios gu bheil an tuil air tràghadh  
Ged a chuir i fàs an talamh.



Màiri Mhòr's 'Oran Beinn Lì' includes a roll-call of the crofters' friends among the press, the *Scottish Highlander*, the *Oban Times* and the *Glasgow Weekly Mail*. The *Oban Times* in particular is praised in traditional terms for its support for the Highland crofters:

Cuiribh litir le sòlas  
Gu pàipear an Obain,  
A bha riamh ga ar còmhnaidh,  
Bhon là thòisich an strì.

Ghabh e bratach na tuath-cheathaairn,  
'S bha i paisgte mu ghuaillan,  
'S nuair a thòisich an tuasaid,  
Chaidh i suas ris a' ghaoith.

Chaidh i suas ann ar fàbhar  
Air na cnocan a b' àirde,  
Chumail misnich sna Gàidheil,  
Mar nì gàirich nam pìob. (Meek 1995: 164)

The pro-landlord newspapers are less well-treated by poets, referred to as '*ragaichean*' (Iain MacIlleathain, Maol Buidhe 'Co-dhiù Thogainn Fonn nan Gaisgeach', in Meek 1995: 140–41) and as '*fear-tagraidh na h-eucoir*', in the case of the *Scotsman* (Màiri Mhòr, 'Oran Beinn Lì', in Meek 1995: 164). In 1885, in 'Brosnachadh nan Gàidheil', Màiri Mhòr refers to 'Na sgeith an *Courier* de chlàbar, / 'S ann am fàbhar ri Sir Coinneach' the *Inverness Courier* being a Liberal paper which supported Sir Kenneth MacKenzie and opposed Charles Fraser Mackintosh, the crofters' candidate (Meek 1998: 191).

The Highland newspapers mentioned above, for the most part, made little, if any, use of Gaelic in their columns, the notable exceptions being the *Highlander* and the *Northern Chronicle*, and to a lesser extent the *Oban Times* and the *Scottish Highlander*. Even then, this was rarely more extensive than a single Gaelic column. This must be seen, however, as a significant improvement on the situation before 1870 when it was virtually unheard of for Gaelic to appear in the Highland press. Alongside the periodicals *An Gàidheil* (1871–77, Gaelic medium with an English section) and the *Celtic Magazine* (1875–88, English-medium for the most part), these newspapers contributed to the climate of increasing cultural confidence by placing Gaelic alongside English. The *Highlander* and *Northern Chronicle* were particularly consistent in their publication of Gaelic columns which dealt with varying subject-matter, including political topics, demonstrating that the culture, language and literature of the Highlands merited a place in the modern world.

The run-up to, and immediate aftermath of, the election campaign of 1885 saw some thirty-eight Gaelic items relating to the election published in the Highland newspapers previously mentioned.<sup>5</sup> Clearly the parliamentary candidates, their supporters, and the newspaper editors realised that there was some mileage to be gained in employing Gaelic in their attempts to communicate with the new electors. Overall those which can be classed as pro-landlord newspapers published some twenty-three items, compared with

the fifteen published by their pro-crofting counterparts. The publications which made most frequent use of Gaelic were the *Northern Chronicle*, with eleven separate Gaelic pieces, and the *Scottish Highlander* with nine. Newspapers which did not normally print articles in Gaelic, a notable example being the fervently pro-landlord *Ross-shire Journal*, were moved to use all means possible to connect with their audience. In total it ran six political articles in Gaelic, four of which were accompanied by English versions, ensuring that all readers had access to the same information. The range of genres used to engage Gaelic speakers in the political debate included Gaelic songs, of which five were printed, all in support of the crofting candidates; *còmhraidhean* or dialogues, an established Gaelic genre, eight of which appeared; letters and speeches by candidates and their supporters.<sup>6</sup> The exhortatory nature of the electioneering material is often flagged in their newspapers headings by words such as ‘Comhairle’, ‘Facail Earail’, and ‘Seòladh’.<sup>7</sup>

#### BURNING NEWSPAPERS

The account of the burning of pro-crofter newspapers in Glenelg in October 1885, at the instigation of Màiri Mhòr, was followed a week later by a further account in the *Scottish Highlander* of copies of the *Ross-shire Journal* being burned in Lewis prior to a meeting of Park Highland Land Law Reform Association (*SH*, 23/10/1885). This is corroborated by the *Invergordon Times* which reported that its rival had been consigned to the flames ‘on the grounds that the statements it contained were entirely contrary to fact and that the organ had consistently misrepresented the cause of the crofters’ (*IT*, 28/10/1885). The Alness branch of the HLLRA was similarly involved in burning what the *Scottish Highlander* termed ‘the Ross-shire landlord organ’ after its meeting in early November ended. (*SH*, 6/11/1885). That this, in common with most instances of newspaper burning at the time was premeditated rather than spontaneous, is indicated by the report in the *Invergordon Times* which stated that ‘about 80 match boxes were immediately produced to set fire to copies of the lying rag, which was bought by members for the purpose of carrying out the resolution’ (*IT*, 4/11/1885). Copies of the *Northern Ensign*, supporter of the Marquis of Sutherland, were committed to the flames after a meeting in Spinningdale addressed by Angus Sutherland, the crofting candidate (*IC*, 21/11/1885). It was not only newspapers which this received this treatment, however, as is demonstrated by the *Oban Times*’s account of a meeting at Durness. After the meeting, letters from John Mackay, Hereford were burned (*OT*, 21/11/1885). Mackay, a supporter of the crofters and a prominent member of the Highland Land Law Reform Association, had given his support to the sitting MP, the Marquis of Sutherland, who had become more radical in his politics, rather than to the crofting candidate, Angus Sutherland.

The pro-landlord newspapers were frequently distributed free of charge as the election loomed, thus providing ample fuel for the crofters’ fires. In Glenurquhart, the Rev Mr. Angus and Mrs Macrae, Free Manse, were reported by the *Scottish Highlander* as having been ‘last week [...] sedulously delivering the Tuesday issue of the *Inverness Courier* among the electors here’ (*SH*, 13/11/1885). North Uist found itself well-supplied with copies of the *Inverness Courier* with, as the *Scottish Highlander* reports, ‘each article or paragraph containing allegations against Mr Fraser-Mackintosh [...] marked with four X’s, more we believe than Sir Kenneth will find recorded in his favour on the ballot papers the day of the election in this parish’ (*SH* 30/10/1885). In Spinningdale, Sutherland the Captain of the local Volunteer Company was said to be delivering the *Northern*

*Ensign* gratis to residents' doors (*SH*, 6/11/1885). And, almost a month after the cremation and burial in Glenelg of the *Scotsman*, *Courier* and *Northern Chronicle*, their arch-enemy, the *Scottish Highlander* reported somewhat smugly that the *Inverness Courier* was still being distributed free of charge in the district and that at a meeting held by the people of Glenelg 'it was at last proposed, seconded, and unanimously adopted, that the paper should be returned to Sir Kenneth [MacKenzie]'s agent marked "With thanks", but unpaid – each crofter to return his own in a separate wrapper, thus clearly incurring costs for the original sender (*SH*, 13/11/1885). What is marked is that these instances are all of pro-landlord organs being burned before or after local meetings, commonly HLLRA meetings. These burnings were clearly a communal experience which reinforced a common sense of purpose among the newly politicised Highland crofters and they provided a starkly unambiguous message to both the newspapers and those whom these newspapers supported. And of course, they were events which allowed those still disenfranchised to participate. References to pro-crofter newspapers being burned are rare. The *Northern Chronicle* mentions the burning of a small pile of unsold *Scottish Highlanders* after a meeting at Knockbain addressed by Mr Reginald MacLeod, Conservative candidate for Inverness-shire (*NC*, 11/11/1885). The *Invergordon Times* reported with some satisfaction how at a meeting held by Mr Munro-Ferguson of Novar, 'one of Novar's indiscreet friends tied a copy of the *Invergordon Times* on a pole to be burned; but, the audience ordered it to be taken down, intimating that Novar would not get a hearing till it was taken down. The demand was complied with.' (*IT*, 25/11/1885) The time of year, with the darker nights of autumn and early winter, would have made these public burnings all the more dramatic, and of course the earlier incidents coincided with Hallowe'en when it was traditional for bonfires to be lit. John Gregorson Campbell, describing Hallowe'en in his discussion of 'The Celtic Year', explained that children would gather material suitable for burning and each house would have its own bonfire with an element of competitiveness as to which would be the biggest: 'whole districts were brilliant with bonfires, and their glare across a Highland loch, and from many eminences, formed an exceedingly picturesque scene' (Black 2005: 559). The availability of suitable fuel for Sconser's Hallowe'en celebrations is noted in the *Oban Times*' account of the village's HLLRA meeting (21/11/1885):

The young men this year will be spared their expedition to the mountains for a certain grass which was wont to be burned that night, for the parcels of *Couriers*, *Chronicles* and Tory pamphlets well saturated in paraffin will supply its place this year.

Burning was not the only fate meted out to newspapers during the election campaign of 1885. In South Uist a meeting of some sixty supporters of Charles Fraser Mackintosh demonstrated their contempt for the *Inverness Courier* and *Northern Ensign* by agreeing that they be buried 'in Manitoba, a part on the common lands of Stoneybridge (so called because the crofters were compelled to reclaim and plant potatoes in it for Lady Cathcart, under penalty of destraint being made upon all lands held by them under the said proprietrix)' (*OT*, 21/11/1885).

As the 1885 election campaign concluded, the burning took a more personal turn, with effigies being committed to the flames. The first instance of this occurring was not

directly linked to the elections, although it did involve an enemy of the crofters, the infamous Sheriff William Ivory. At the conclusion of a meeting in Portree in support of Mr Dugald MacLachlan, a sympathiser with the crofters whom Ivory had dismissed as Sheriff-Clerk for Skye, an effigy of the Sheriff suffered taunts and manhandling before being carried to Somerled Square where it was set on fire, its remains being trampled and kicked by the assembled crowd (*OT*, 5/12/1885; *IA*, 4/12/1885). An effigy of Ronald Munro-Ferguson of Novar received similar treatment. Munro-Ferguson had been Liberal MP for Ross and Cromarty since a by-election in August 1884, but failed to be returned by the expanded electorate of 1885 who chose the crofting candidate, Dr Roderick MacDonald, to represent them. Both the *Northern Chronicle* and the *Oban Times* reported that Novar was burned in effigy in and around Lochcarron (*NC*, 9/12/1885; *OT*, 19/12/1885). Most interesting however, as it demonstrates again the strength of feeling aroused by the newspapers and the place which they had come to occupy in the consciousness of crofters, is the report from the *Northern Chronicle's* Stornoway correspondent who wrote (9/12/1885):

On Thursday evening a procession headed by an effigy of the editor of the *Ross-shire Journal*, carried on the shoulders of a sturdy tradesman, and escorted by a considerable number of young men carrying lighted torches, appeared on the street. After perambulating the thoroughfares the processionists returned to the public square, where, amidst loud cheers and laughter, the effigy was committed to the flames. The torches and the blazing effigy were afterwards thrown into the harbour, and the crowd rapidly dispersed in good humour.<sup>8</sup>

The results of the 1885 elections were celebrated the length and breadth of the Highlands with bonfires and music. A letter from 'Gille Bàn' in North Uist relates 'Thog iad teintean aig a' bhaile, agus bha iad an sin a bàthadh *Chronicle* agus *Courier* le paraffin agus ga'n tilgeadh anns an teine gus an robh iad an impis an ciabhagan fhein a dhathadh' (*SH*, 29/1/1886). In Argyll, Donald Horne MacFarlane's victory was marked by no less than four bonfires in Lismore, not to mention those in Mull and parts of the mainland (*OT*, 12/12/1885). In Fort William, to celebrate the victory of Charles Fraser Mackintosh, 'a piper was then procured, and a procession formed, which marched through the village cheering loudly as they went along. A bonfire erected at the east end of the town was lighted at about 8pm around which a large crowd had gathered' (*IA*, 11/12/1885). The *Ross-shire Journal*, in giving account of celebrations of the Marquis of Stafford's victory in Sutherland notes one instance of the 'Invergordon 'rag' as the *Times* is commonly termed here' being committed to the flames accompanied by a band playing the 'Dead march in Saul' (*RJ*, 4/12/1885). In Kintail, after copies of the *Ross-shire Journal*, and letters from the Rev. Mr MacAskill's had been burned, an individual referred to only as 'Carridael' in the *Oban Times*, delivered the impromptu verse:

Chaidh an Rag a thiolachdadh  
Bho'n athar do na breugan e;  
Cha charaid do chriosduidh e,-  
'S tri *cheers* do *Thiom* an *Obain!* (*OT*, 19/12/1885)

Even the newspaper reporters themselves were apparently not immune from the opprobrium which was cast upon their publications. The *Northern Chronicle* reports that at a meeting held by the Radical, Mr W. B. McLaren in Inverness after his electoral defeat by Robert Finlay in the Inverness Burghs, the reporters from the *Chronicle* and *Courier* ‘were received with hisses and cries of “Put them out,”’ (NC, 2/12/1885).

Some 77% of the Highland electorate voted in the 1885 election, the highest ever turnout for a general election in the Highlands, demonstrating an unparalleled level of interest – either before or after – in politics. This was a period of unprecedented politicisation in the Highlands with the extension of the franchise empowering a new section of the crofting population and coinciding with the campaigning of the crofters and their supporters for improved land rights. The Highland press, whether pro-landlord or pro-crofter, was very much at the forefront of the election campaign, helping to mobilise the electorate. In occupying such a prominent role it was, on occasions, not simply a source of news, but something of a news story in itself as its incineration illuminated the dark nights of late autumn and early winter throughout the Highlands and Islands.

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<i>MT</i>	<i>Mac-Talla</i>
<i>NC</i>	<i>Northern Chronicle</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>Northern Ensign</i>
<i>OT</i>	<i>Oban Times</i>
<i>RJ</i>	<i>Ross-shire Journal</i>
<i>SH</i>	<i>Scottish Highlander</i>
<i>TG</i>	<i>An Teachdaire Gae’lach</i>

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#### APPENDIX

Gaelic electioneering material published in Highland newspapers  
September–December 1885

\* indicates a song / poem

1. 'Beachdan Mhaighstir Reginald Mhic Leòid mu thimchioll nan croitearan agus mu chuis na h-Eaglais', (NC, 3/9/1885).

2. 'A Chroitearan, A Chroitearan, 's a Thuath-Bhig Leughaibh So', (*NC*, 16/9/1885).
3. Ceilidh Dhun-Chonail eadar Donnachadh Fear Dhun-Chonail; Anna a Bhean; agus Domhnull Mac-Aonghais, Fear Rugha-nam-Faoileann', (*SH*, 25/9/1885).
4. 'Cor nan Croitearan Gaidhealach. Oraid a Chaidh a labhairt aig Coinneamh anns a' Mhorairne, le Mr. Ian Dòmhnallach', (*SH*, 2/10/1885).
5. 'Cor nan Croitearan Gaidhealach', Continued from *SH*: 2/10/1885, (*SH*, 9/10/1885).
6. 'The Pope of the Lewis Elders – his Patriotic Utterances analysed' followed by 'a Free and Easy Translation of the Above Letter', from 'a Highlander / Gael', Stornoway. (*RJ*, 9/10/1885).
7. 'Bratach nan Croitearan', D. Mac Dhomhnuill, Grianaig, (*OT*, 10/10/1885).\*
8. Gaelic speech delivered by Ex-Baillie Maclellan, Inverness-shire (*IC*, 13/10/1885).
9. 'Comhradh eadar Triuir Chroitearan ann an Cataobh – Ruaraidh, Uilleam agus Calum', (*NC*, 14/10/1885).
10. Gaelic speech by Mr Colin Chisholm (*IC*, 20/10/1885).
11. 'Dubhlan Mhaighstir Fraser-Mackintosh', (*NC*, 21/10/1885).
12. 'An Fhirinn mu dheibhinn Lochend' (*NC*, 28/10/1885).
13. 'Sgeul da Sheann Chroiteir' [letter dated 'Lochend dlùth ri Inbhirnis' and signed by John Cameron and John Ferguson], (*NC*, 28/10/1885).
14. 'Cataobh – Comhradh na'n Croitairan', (*NC*, 28/10/1885).
15. 'Comhradh eadar Triuir Chroitearan ann an Cataobh – Ruaraidh, Uilleam agus Calum', (*NE*, 28/10/1885) – republication of No. 7.
16. 'Facail Earail do Luchd-Taghaidh Fear-Pàrlamaid do Shiorrachd Inbhirnis', 'Mac Croiteir', (*SH*, 30/10/1885).
17. 'Òlaibh Slainte Thearlaich', Màiri Nighean Iain Bhain, (*SH*, 30/10/1885).\*
18. 'Taghadh Parlamaid Siorrachd Rois – Costas an Dr Domhnallaich', translation of 'The Election Expenses of the Crofter Candidate in Ross-shire' 'Fairplay' (*RJ*, 6/11/1885).

19. ‘Cataobh – Comhradh na’n Croitairian’, (*NC*, 11/11/1885).
20. ‘Comhradh mu Cheist an Fhearainn’, (*IT*, 11/11/1885).
21. ‘Dleasnas nan Gaidheal’, ‘Domhnall nan Ord’, (*SH*, 13/11/1885).
22. ‘Comhairle an Urramaich Murachadh Mac-Ascuill d’a luchd-duthcha’, M. Mac-Ascuill (*RJ*, 13/11/1885).
23. ‘Comhairle an Urramaich Murachadh Mac-Ascuill d’a luchd-duthcha’, M. Mac-Ascuill, republication of No. 19, but with an English translation preceding it. (*RJ*, 20/11/1885).
24. ‘Cataobh – Comhradh na’n Croitairian’, (*NC*, 18/11/1885).
25. ‘Bocan mhora na h-Eaglais’, ‘Caraid na h-Eaglais’, (*SH*, 20/11/1885).
26. ‘Dèadh-Chomhairle Croitear Leodhasach’, ‘Croitear Leodhasach’ (*RJ*, 20/11/1885).
27. ‘Mac Phàrlain o’n Arrair’, D. Mac Dhughaill, (*OT*, 21/11/1885).\*
28. ‘Cataobh – Comhradh na’n Croitairian’, (*NC*, 25/11/1885, supplement).
29. ‘Deoch Slàinte a Ghaisgeach’ (*IT*, 25/11/1885).\*
30. ‘Comhairle do Chroitearan Siorrachd Inbhirnis’, ‘Mac Croiteir’, (*SH*, 27/11/1885).
31. ‘How to vote’ – Gaelic translation follows English (*RJ*, 27/11/1885).
32. ‘Bratach Mhic Pharlain’, ‘Craoiteir Aosda’, (*OT*, 28/11/1885).\*
33. ‘Seoladh mu’n bhallot’, (*IC*, 28/11/1885)
34. ‘Taghadh Fear-Parlamaid air son Siorrachdan Rois agus Chrombaidh’, (*IT*, 28/11/1885).
35. ‘Seoladh mu’n bhallot’, (*IC*, 1/12/1885) – republication of No. 31
36. ‘Seoladh mu’n bhallot’, (*IC*, 1/12/1885) – republication of Nos 31 & 32
37. ‘Cìod a thàinig oirnn?’, ‘Ailpein’, (*NC*, 16/12/1885).
38. ‘Ceilidh Dhun-Chonaill, eadar Donnachadh, Fear Dhun-Chonaill; Anna a Bhean; am Maighstir-sgoile; agus Fear-na-Farcluais’, (*SH*, 18/12/1885).



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<sup>1</sup> In a series of articles entitled 'Yachting and Electioneering in the Hebrides' published in the *Celtic Magazine* in 1885, Hector Rose Mackenzie gives an account of Charles Fraser Mackintosh's electioneering travels on the steam yacht 'Carlotta' during September of that year. He refers to Màiri Mhòr being on board for a short part of the journey between Portree and Glenelg (*CM* 11, 1885:352).

<sup>2</sup> As was the case before the electoral reforms, annual registration courts revised the new roll of voters and the agents of parliamentary candidates devoted their energies to ensuring registration for as many of their supporters as possible while opposing that of their rivals' supporters. It is interesting to note that in 1885 at the registration court in Fort William, 78 claims were admitted out of the 200 made, a large number being disqualified for non-payment of poor-rates (*NC* 7/10/1885); in Skye, of the 101 claims lodged by the Conservative candidate (Reginald Macleod) 63 were admitted, of the 1655 claims lodged by Charles Fraser Mackintosh only 244 were admitted (*NC* 14/10/1885).

<sup>3</sup> John Murdoch's radical *Highlander* had ceased publishing in 1882.

<sup>4</sup> John Galloway Weir, Hampstead stood unsuccessfully in the 1885 Election for the Falkirk Burghs against evicting landlord John Ramsay of Kildalton. In 1892, standing as an Independent Unionist he was elected for Ross-shire (Cameron 2000: 197).

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix. While thirty-eight items are listed in the appendix, this includes four items which were re-published, either in the same or a different newspaper during the pre-Election period.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of nineteenth-century còmhradh see Kidd, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> This is part of a larger study of electioneering material in Gaelic which I am currently undertaking.

<sup>8</sup> The editor of the *Ross-shire Journal* was Lewis Munro.